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SUBJECT: NIGERIA'S OBASANJO SEEKING WARMER RELATIONS WITH U.S.

REF: ABUJA 1913

CLASSIFIED BY CDA ANDREWS. REASON: 1.5(B)

1. (C) Summary: President Obasanjo senses a loss of warmth in Nigeria's relationship with the U.S. and feels the U.S. and U.K. are frustrating his efforts by setting too tough terms for support, according to his VP. Obasanjo reportedly blames reports from Embassy Abuja and the British High Commission. End Summary.

2. (C) Vice President Atiku Abubakar told CDA privately evening of March 24 that, shortly before departing for the U.S., President Obasanjo had expressed disappointment and sadness at what he felt was waning warmth in the bilateral relationship. Obasanjo had expected more support for his debt relief entreaties - not just from the U.S., but also from the U.K. Instead, Obasanjo found attitudes in Washington and London hardening, and, Atiku added, Obasanjo attributed this shift in attitude to reports being filed by Embassy Abuja and the British High Commission here. Obasanjo felt he was going in the right direction, and that greater flexibility from the U.S. and U.K. would be in order.

3. (C) Atiku said that he had spoken only briefly with Obasanjo since the latter's return from the U.S. and Libya because he (Atiku) had taken a few days' break at Yankari National Park (his first-ever trip there). However, the President felt his visit was satisfactory, notwithstanding President Bush's unavailability for a private one-on-one conversation. Obasanjo appreciated the President's plans to visit Africa next year and looked forward to the trip. The meeting with Secretary Powell had gone well, and Obasanjo attributed this at least in part to his decision to announce that Nigeria would resume relations with the IMF.

4. (C) CDA commented that, in light of 9/11, Nigeria should not expect the Bush Administration to give Nigeria the same attention that its predecessor had been able to offer. The world had changed on 9/11, especially for the U.S., and our President had to focus intently on homeland security. This new, overriding priority meant President Bush did not have as much time for other issues as he would like to have, but that fact should not be misunderstood as lack of warmth or concern. On the contrary, the U.S. remained strongly engaged in Africa.

5. (C) Comment: We suspect that what irked President Obasanjo skin may have been a May 24 meeting at which Ambassador Isaac Aluko-Olukun of Nigeria's National Planning Commission briefed G-7 Heads of Mission on NePAD (reftel). Aluko-Olukun called for more G-7 carrots and fewer sticks; he particularly wanted support for building infrastructure. British Acting High Commissioner Bird raised serious problems of corruption and lack of transparency. CDA followed up by asking Aluko-Olukun to describe what practical, effective steps were being taken to address these problems. Obasanjo may have been annoyed, but he seems to have recognized that re-engagement with the IMF would be a useful step. Today's \$64,000 question asks whether this announcement is purely symbolic, portending a renewed "dialogue", or presages GON interest in genuine reform, the stresses of an election year notwithstanding.

ANDREWS